

Mary Oden to Emily J. Semmes

Martinsburg, Virginia, July 10, 1863.

Autograph letter signed, 5 pages.

Martinsburg

Friday July 10th 1863

My Dear M^{rs} Semmes

I need hardly ask you to pardon me for addressing you in this your season of sore anguish and bereavement, it will be enough to state in apology for so doing, that your sainted husband fell asleep among us; it was a privilege to have his example before us, teaching us that the soldier of Christ has nothing to fear when passing through the dark valley. D^r Hadley one of his surgeons, remarked to him, that he bore his sufferings with great calmness, his reply was, I am endeavouring to bear them like a Christian philosopher; even when suffering severe pain he seemed to take pleasure in conversing and after he became so ill talked constantly of his family. In a conversation with him, he told me that he thought he would write the despatch to be sent to you himself as you would feel less uneasy. I suggested that it might be taxing his strength too far, he wrote but little however; you have I suppose received it, but we thought you would like to have the original, we fortunately obtained it from the operator here, you will find it enclosed with several locks of hair in this letter. I know by experience how hard it is to resign a [2] friend from whom we have been separated for a long time, whom he had fondly hoped to see again; that they should die far from home and among strangers adds keenly to our grief, but you my dear friend in affliction, will derive infinite comfort from the knowledge that his brother, your nephew and a friend that loved him tenderly, when he breathed his last were with him; he passed away just as D^r Pryor a Presbyterian minister had opened the Testament to read to him. To a minister who was with him earlier in the evening he expressed his willingness to die; his only regret was leaving his wife and children. Much very much sympathy is felt for you all; I have thought so much of your daughters, I too am fatherless, yes even worse than that an orphan indeed, but little more than a year has passed since our dear Mother was numbered with the dead; my dear Father has been dead a number of years and I know what it is to be without that fatherly love and protection which the heart ever yearns for. Excuse me for referring to my own trouble,

I only do it in order that you may feel that you have the warmest sympathy of those who know how to sympathize, because they too have trod affliction's path. I wish you could see the quantities of beautiful flowers brought here this morning; for fear you may not be able again to look upon the deceased, I will tell you the arrangement, for no particular is trifling concerning those we love; a large bouquet of white flowers and evergreens was placed [3] upon his bosom, white jessamine, clematis, and ivy were placed around the sides of the coffin near his head, on the outside two bouquets similar [*inserted*: to the first] were placed, one at the foot, the other below the glass, in the middle his coat and sword have been laid. His remains are laid in the sitting room according to Captain Cody's request, as it takes some little time to make arrangements, he preferred it to the parlors. Your husband desired Mr. Cleveland to find out each of our names in order to tell you, our family consists of my Aunt M^{rs} Pendleton, M^r & M^{rs} Allen, (my brother in law and sister) my sister Kate, my brother and myself; we have a friend Miss Murphy who was with us during his sickness. His friends now make efficient nurses that we could not do much, Kate prepared herself what little he eat while here; he came on Sunday morning July 7th [5th] about eleven o'clock, he rested better he thought that night than usual; the next morning he seemed better; in the evening my sister took him some raspberries and cream which he seemed to enjoy very much, he talked to her sometime about Virginia and Georgia. Thursday evening between three and four we thought he was dying, a surgeon and minister were both sent for, once he asked what time it was on being told that it was three, he said "by quarter past three I hope to be with Christ." We told M^r Hanson, that he was far away from Christ that he had not come up to His standard, but he was willing to die and ascribed his conversion to your example. I have been this minute in relating as far as possible all that relates to the departed, for fear that [4] you may not hear all, for gentlemen sometimes forget little things that transpire, then perhaps M^r Cleveland may not be able to go to you, every word I know is treasured up as a precious memorial in the heart's casket and a twice told tale is not unwelcome when it concerns our beloved ones. While I write my heart is saddened by the thought that you are unconscious as yet of your irreparable loss. I wish you could be here, but God has ordered it otherwise, and may He give you grace patiently and resignedly to say, "Thy will be done." In conclusion my dear M^{rs} Semmes allow me to say, that what little we could do to conduce to your husband's comfort has been a great pleasure; we saw him first two weeks before his death passing through with his Brigade, his appearance struck us so forcibly that Captain Cheever, his commissary whom we

had known before asked us if we would like to make his acquaintance, we then invited him to tea, his duties prevented his acceptance of the invitation, Captain Cody came with D^E Told & Capt Cheever and though we had not known the General he seemed very far from a stranger when brought among us. He has passed away but his spirit is now enjoying perfect peace; we mourn not [*inserted: for*] the dead but the living: for those who will grieve sadly that the privilege of ministering to the departed was denied them accept the love and deep sympathy of each member of our family, praying again that God may strengthen you even as he did him. I remain with much love your sympathizing friend –

Mary Oden

[5] One little circumstance I have forgotten; a few moments before the General died, he asked for his sword, laying it across his arm, he asked again for his Testament he took it and with it in his hands expired, they would have left it so, but that he had asked that you should have it. Oh! if all our warriors might die as he did, death would be robbed of half its sting.

[*inserted at the top of page one: PS – You will also find a few evergreens, taken from the bouquets laid upon the coffin my sister thought you would value them.*]